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S E C R E T SANAA 000726

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [YM](#) [COUNTER](#) [TERRORISM](#)

SUBJECT: FIGHTING ESCALATES IN SAADA: AL-HOUTHI LIVES ON

REF: SANAA 697

1. (U) Renewed fighting between government forces and followers of the slain anti-American rebel cleric Hussein al-Houthi occurred on March 28. Reports from official media and Post contacts indicate over 20 casualties from both sides. The ROYG blamed the current uprising on the dead cleric's father, 81 year-old Badr Eddin al-Houthi, who is accused of breaking a cease-fire agreement that has held since the killing of his son by security forces last September. The London-based Arabic daily al-Hayat reported that Badr Eddin al-Houthi was captured by government forces, but this has yet to be confirmed. ROYG sources report that the rebels set up roadblocks on the Saada-Dhahyan-Bagem road and attacked military checkpoints. There are no official reports of civilian casualties, but tribal sources claim several homes were destroyed by Army artillery fire.

2. (C) Badr Eddin al-Houthi, considered one of Yemen's most prominent Zaidi Shia leaders, recently criticized the ROYG for holding hundreds of supporters of his son's movement, the Believing Youth, who were rounded up during fighting in Saada last summer and have remained detained in Sanaa. The elder al-Houthi claims the truce between his son's supporters and government forces rested on a ROYG-promised amnesty for the captured Believing Youth. Deputy Foreign Minister Noman told Pol/Econ Chief on March 29 that many detainees are "young kids" aged 15-18. According to Noman, attempts by Judge al-Hitar to "rehabilitate the children" have stalled and all of the detainees refused opportunities to return home in exchange for denouncing their beliefs.

3. (S) This round of violence follows a previous flare-up near Saada on March 19 (reftel). (Comment: Al-Houthi, the father, has left virtual house arrest in Sanaa and returned to his home region, possibly foreshadowing a resurgence of the rebellion under his leadership. Post just learned that 140 CSF U.S.-trained soldiers have been sent to the area of conflict. We will be watching closely to see if this flare-up is an isolated incident or the precursor to renewed large-scale fighting akin to what we saw last summer. End comment.)
Khoury